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ABSTRACT

Teacher immediacy has been a widely studied construct with the overall finding that being immediate is good. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy has been associated with increased motivation to study and learning. The most common methodology used to measure teacher immediacy has been student reports. An underlying assumption of this methodology is that students are able to objectively observe and report the behaviors performed by their instructor. The validity of this methodology has never been examined. A series of four studies examined a variety of individual differences (self-perceived social style; communication apprehension; self-esteem and trait motivation; and selected demographic variables) that may influence how students report their instructors' immediacy behaviors. Subjects included over 1,000 undergraduate students enrolled in various communication courses at midwestern and eastern universities. Findings suggest that the individual differences examined do not influence the reporting of immediacy, providing support for the use of this methodology. (Contains 36 references.) (Author/RS)

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Using Student Reports to Measure Immediacy:

Is it a Valid Methodology?

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Abstract

Teacher immediacy has been a widely studied construct with the overall finding that being immediate is good. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy has been associated with increased motivation to study and learning. The most common methodology used to measure teacher immediacy has been student reports. An underlying assumption of this methodology is that students are able to objectively observe and report the behaviors performed by their instructor. The validity of this methodology has never been examined. The purpose of this study is to examine a variety of individual differences that may influence how students report their instructors' immediacy behaviors. Results from four studies conclude that the individual differences examined do not influence the reporting of immediacy, providing support for the use of this methodology.

Teacher immediacy has been the subject of a great deal of research over the past 15 years. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy have been examined in relation to affective and cognitive learning (Andersen, 1979; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987; Gorham, 1988), classroom management (Kearney, Plax, Richmond,' & McCroskey, 1984; Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Richmond, 1990), motivation to study (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1994), humor (Gorham & Christophel, 1990), and in the intercultural classroom (Powell & Harville, 1990; Sanders & Wiseman, 1990; Thompson, 1992). The overall result of this program of research is that use of immediacy in the classroom creates positive outcomes for students in terms of enhanced learning and motivation. In addition, teachers who are immediate are evaluated more positively (McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, Fayer, & Barraclough, 1995). Despite the quantity of research conducted using the verbal immediacy scale (Gorham, 1988) and the nonverbal immediacy scale (Richmond, et al., 1987), relatively little effort has been made to establish the validity of the immediacy measures.

A basic assumption of the student report methodology used to assess teacher immediacy is that students are able to objectively report the behaviors they have observed their instructor performing. The

question that has been avoided in studies of immediacy is whether or not individual student characteristics influence the manner in which students report immediacy behaviors. If students' personality or other individual differences influence how they report immediacy, then the association between immediacy and learning and immediacy and motivation is likely confounded.

Recently Robinson and Richmond (1995) examined the validity of the verbal immediacy scale. They point out that the verbal immediacy scale was developed by identifying effective verbal behaviors of teachers, and determine that these behaviors are not highly correlated with nonverbal immediacy. Robinson and Richmond recommend suspending the use of the verbal immediacy scale until greater validity can be established. Although Robinson and Richmond question the content validity of the verbal immediacy scale, they do acknowledge that it does measures teacher behavior. The goal of this the studies presented here are to examine the validity of the methodology used in measuring immediacy, and not the content of the scales.

The purpose of the present paper is to establish some validity of the verbal and nonverbal immediacy measures by examining the impact of student characteristics on reports of teacher verbal and

nonverbal immediacy. In order for the student report methodology to be valid, students' individual characteristics must not significantly and meaningfully affect the manner in which they report their instructors' immediacy behaviors. If students' individual characteristics are associated with verbal and/or nonverbal immediacy, then these measures are not valid measures of immediacy. The overall research question driving the following studies is:

RQ: Do individual characteristics affect students' reporting of teacher verbal and/or nonverbal immediacy?

A series of studies were conducted to address the above research question. Self-perceived social style, communication apprehension, self-esteem, trait motivation, and selected demographic variables are used in the following studies. Discussion of each of the four studies will be withheld until the final discussion and conclusion of the paper.

Study One - Social Style

One individual difference that may impact how students report teacher immediacy is social style. Social style refers to an individual's tendency to react, associate, and adapt to another in communication situations. Based on communication behaviors that are generally demonstrated across various contexts, social style is usually classified into two orthogonal dimensions: assertiveness and responsiveness

(Borgatta, 1960; Buchholz, Lashbrook, & Wenburg, 1976; Lashbrook, 1974; Mehrabian, 1971; Merrill & Reid, 1981; Richmond & McCroskey, 1989; Snavely, 1981; Wheeless & Reichel, 1990).

Assertiveness is used to describe an individual who is able to defend her/his position with confidence, while responsiveness refers to the warmth, compassion, and friendliness expressed by an individual. Individual's who are highly assertive and highly responsive are thought to be more versatile and competent communicators (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989). Individuals who perceive themselves as competent are likely to perceive their communication with others differently than individuals who perceive themselves as less competent communicators. Working from this assumption, if student reports of immediacy are subjective (rather than objective and relatively free from influence by individual characteristics and perceptions), then assertiveness and responsiveness will be significantly correlated with verbal and nonverbal immediacy. To test this hypothesis the following study was conducted.

Participants

Participants consisted of 222 students (107 males and 115 females) enrolled in a large introductory communication course at a mid-sized eastern university. Data was collected roughly 10 weeks into the

semester, which provided participants with sufficient opportunity to observe their instructors' behaviors. Participants were asked to think of the instructor they had in the class immediately preceding their introductory communication class. Participants reported on 122 male instructors and on 24 female instructors (76 participants did not report instructor sex).

Measures

Social Style. Social style was measured using Richmond and McCroskey's (1989) Assertiveness-Responsiveness Measure which is designed as a self-report of social style. It consists of 20 items using a five-point Likert-type scale and is anchored with strongly agree and strongly disagree. The alpha reliability of the measure was .82 for assertiveness and .88 for responsiveness.

Immediacy. Verbal immediacy was measured with Gorham's (1988) verbal immediacy scale which consists of 20 items. Nonverbal immediacy was measured using Richmond, et al.'s (1987) nonverbal immediacy scale which consists of 14 items. Both scales used a Likert-type scale from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often). The alpha reliability for the verbal immediacy scale was .91 and for nonverbal immediacy was .81.

Results

Pearson Product Moment correlations were used to respond to the research question posed above. Verbal immediacy was correlated with assertiveness at .13 and with responsiveness at .16 ($p > .05$). Similarly nonverbal immediacy was correlated with assertiveness at .03 and with responsiveness at .06 ($p > .05$), indicating no significant relationship between immediacy and social style.

Study Two - Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) has been the focus of extensive research, and is well established personality characteristic. McCroskey (1977) defined communication apprehension as the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication. High levels of CA have been associated with lower GPA (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989), lower scores on the American College Test (McCroskey & Andersen, 1976), a higher drop-out from college (McCroskey, et al., 1989), and more negative attitudes toward school (Hurt & Preiss, 1978).

Teachers have been found to have different expectation for quiet children compared to more verbal children. McCroskey and Daly (1976) found that elementary teachers perceived highly apprehensive children to have poorer participation and as doing more poorly in all academic areas than low apprehensive children. The findings that

high CA students have more negative experiences in school combined with research indicating that teachers have more negative perceptions of high CA students, gives us reason to believe that highly apprehensive students may perceive teacher behaviors differently than low CA students. High CA students have a different classroom experience than do low CA students, and therefore it is likely that high CA students will report teacher immediacy behaviors differently than low CA students.

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 271 undergraduate students (137 males, 120 females, and 14 who did not indicate gender) enrolled in a introductory course at an eastern university. As in study one, participants were asked to think of the instructor they had in the class immediately prior to their introductory communication class. Data was collected approximately seven weeks into the semester. Participants reported on 112 male instructors, 151 female instructors and nine participants did not indicate instructor gender.

Measures

Communication Apprehension. Trait communication apprehension (CA) was measured using the PRCA-24 (McCroskey, 1982). The scale consists of 24 Likert-type items using a 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly

disagree) scale. The alpha reliability of the PRCA-24 in this study was .95.

Immediacy. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy were measured using the same scales as used in study one. Alpha reliability for verbal immediacy in this study was .88, and for nonverbal immediacy was .78.

Results

To test the above hypothesis the Pearson Product Moment correlation between CA and verbal and nonverbal immediacy were examined. The correlation between CA and verbal immediacy was -.12 ($p > .05$), and was -.10 ($p > .05$) between CA and nonverbal immediacy. While highly apprehensive students appear to report slightly lower levels of immediacy, the relationship is not significant.

Study Three - Self-Esteem and Trait Motivation

Self-esteem is another personality characteristic that has received a great deal of research attention in psychology and has been linked to academic achievement (Liu, Kaplan, & Risser, 1992). Self-esteem has been defined as "an expression of approval or disapproval, indicating the extent to which a person believes himself or herself competent, successful, significant and worthy" (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 1). Liu, et al. (1992) concluded that high levels of self-esteem had a positive impact on students' motivation to learn and study. Low self-esteem was

associated with a host of variables, all leading to poorer performance in school.

As with CA, it can be expected that students with low self-esteem have a different experience in school and with teachers than do students with high self-esteem. This different experience may lead low self-esteem students to perceive and report teacher immediacy behaviors differently than high self-esteem students.

Students' trait motivation is another individual difference that may influence how students report immediacy. Brophy (1987) defined motivation as existing as both a state and a trait. State motivation is influenced by situational variables such as the classroom environment, the teacher, or the content. Both verbal and nonverbal immediacy have repeatedly been associated with students' state motivation to learn. Both Christophel (1990) and Richmond (1990) found immediacy to be positively associated with state motivation. Frymier (1993; 1994) replicated this relationship. Teacher immediacy is viewed as a situational variable that should influence state motivation. Trait motivation, on the other hand, is defined as a relatively stable and enduring characteristic that is not influenced by situational variables. Therefore, immediacy should not influence trait motivation.

Students' level of trait motivation may influence how they view the instructor which in turn may influence how they report teacher immediacy behaviors. The following study was conducted to examine the relationship between self-esteem and immediacy and trait motivation and immediacy.

Participants

In this study participants consisted of 470 undergraduate students (214 males, 255 females, and 1 who did not report gender) enrolled in one of two introductory communication classes from a midwestern university. Participants were asked to think of the teacher they had immediately prior to their communication class while completing the measures. Data was collected approximately twelve weeks into the semester. Participants reported on 309 male and 160 female instructors.

Measures

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem was measured using Rosenberg's (1965) scale which consists of ten Likert-type items using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. The alpha reliability of the self-esteem scale in this study was .87.

Immediacy. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy were measured using the same scales as used in study one and two. Alpha reliability for

verbal immediacy in this study was .87, and for nonverbal immediacy was .82.

Motivation. Trait motivation was operationalized with Richmond's (1990) motivation scale. The motivation scale consisted of five, seven-step bipolar adjectives which asked students how they felt in general about studying for classes. Trait motivation had an alpha reliability of .86 in this study.

Results

Pearson Product Moment correlations were used to determine if students' self-esteem was related to their reports of teacher immediacy. The correlation between self-esteem and verbal immediacy was .01 ($p > .05$), and .06 ($p > .05$) between self-esteem and nonverbal immediacy. These results indicate that students' level of self-esteem was not associated with their reports of teacher immediacy.

Pearson correlations were also used to examine the relationship between trait motivation and immediacy. The correlation between verbal immediacy and trait motivation was -.03 ($p = .46$), indicating no relationship. The correlation between nonverbal immediacy and trait motivation was -10 ($p = .03$), indicating a small relationship. Apparently students with high levels of trait motivation report slightly lower levels of nonverbal immediacy. However, students with high

trait motivation under reporting nonverbal immediacy would artificially lower the correlation between immediacy and state motivation and learning, and not artificially increase it. While this significant correlation between trait motivation and nonverbal immediacy is disturbing, it is not of the magnitude nor direction to seriously question previous immediacy research.

Study Four - Class Rank, Major, and Sex

Demographic differences are likely to affect students' classroom experiences and expectations. For example males and females have different classroom experiences beginning in elementary school (Brophy & Good, 1974). Students' experience with college and their major may also lead to different expectations in the classroom. Students' expectations are likely to influence how they perceive the instructor. Factors that influence students' perception may in turn influence how students report teacher behaviors. Three demographic factors which vary in the typical college classroom are class rank, major, and sex. In the following study, we attempted to determine whether these three characteristics influence how students report verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

Participants

Participants consisted of 178 undergraduate students enrolled in one of several communication courses at an eastern university. The sample consisted of 87 males, 87 females, and 4 who did not indicate their sex who reported on 105 male, 67 female, and 6 unidentified instructors. There were 40 freshman, 50 sophomores, 50 juniors, 35 seniors and 3 who did not indicate their class rank. Participants were asked to think of the instructor they had in the class immediately after their communication class when completing the survey instruments. Data was collected during the last week of the semester.

Measurement

Immediacy. Immediacy was measured using the same measures as in the above studies. The alpha reliability for verbal immediacy in this study was .84, and nonverbal immediacy was .83.

Major. Major was measured by asking students what college their major was located in. The colleges were: agriculture and forestry (13), arts and science (59), creative arts (1 which was combined with other in the statistical analysis), business and economics (50), engineering (11), education, and other (35).

Results

To answer the above research question, analysis of variance was used. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy served as dependent variables in separate analyses with class rank, major, and sex serving as independent variables. Scheffe tests were used to test all mean comparisons.

The analysis of variance indicated no significant differences in reported verbal immediacy behaviors among freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors [$F(3/170) = .70$, $p = .55$]. Nor were significant differences found for nonverbal immediacy [$F(3/174) = .28$, $p = .84$]. Analysis of variance also found no significant differences in verbal immediacy among majors [$F(7/171) = 1.06$, $p = .39$], nor nonverbal immediacy [$F(7/175) = 1.40$, $p = .21$]. Additionally, no sex differences were found in the reporting of verbal immediacy [$F(1/169) = 2.0$, $p = .16$], or nonverbal immediacy [$F(1/173) = .01$, $p = .91$].

Discussion of Results

The results of these four studies support the use of student reports of their teachers behaviors as a means of assessing immediacy. Students' social style, self-esteem, communication apprehension, trait motivation, sex, class rank, and major do not influence their ability to observe and report instructors' immediacy behaviors. These results

support the notion that students are able to objectively report the immediacy behaviors performed by their teachers.

The personality variables of self-perceived social style, communication apprehension, and self-esteem were not associated with nonverbal or verbal immediacy. Students with different personality orientations are expected to have different educational experiences. Students with high communication apprehension have more negative experiences with school (see Richmond & McCroskey, 1995 for a review), as do students with low self-esteem (Liu, et al., 1992). Although there is little research on self-perceived social style, we expect people's beliefs about their communication abilities to impact their communication experiences with others. While we have every reason to believe that the students who participated in these studies had different personality orientations and educational experiences, there were no differences in how they reported their instructors' communication behaviors.

Trait motivation had no relationship with verbal immediacy and only a small relationship with nonverbal immediacy. Why trait motivation would have an impact on nonverbal immediacy and not verbal immediacy is unclear. Although the correlation between nonverbal immediacy and trait motivation was significant, it may not

be meaningful, and may have been a result of chance. Only further research will tell. Overall, the trait motivation results provide additional support for the use of student reports in measuring immediacy.

The three demographic characteristics, class rank, major, and sex, did not appear to influence how students reported their instructors' immediacy behaviors. These findings do not rule out the influence of all demographic differences on the reporting of immediacy. Other differences, especially race and ethnicity may influence how students perceive and in turn report immediacy behaviors. Unfortunately, the college populations we had access to were too homogeneous to make race and ethnicity comparisons.

Conclusion

The strength of the immediacy scales may reside in the fact that they are behavior oriented. The items that make up both scales are descriptions of behaviors in which students are asked to determine how frequently these behaviors are performed. Students are not asked to evaluate the goodness, appropriateness, or effectiveness of a behavior; they are simply asked to estimate how frequently the behavior is exhibited by their instructor. This methodology may encourage students to be objective and help them to put aside their

affective evaluations of instructors.

This methodology can be extended to the measurement of other variables. As long as there are behavioral indicators of the concept, a scale containing these behavioral indicators could be used to measure the concept. This methodology also has the advantage of being relatively easy and quick to use, especially when compared to training observers to rate the behavior of an instructor.

The validity of the verbal and nonverbal immediacy scales needs to be further investigated. The content validity issues of the verbal immediacy scale identified by Robinson and Richmond (1994) particularly need attention. To further our understanding of the immediacy concept (verbal and nonverbal) we need to be sure of the validity of our measuring instruments.

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